

## THE SAN LORENZO LAUREL

FREDERICK ALVIN MEYER

For many years the great California Laurel (*Umbellularia californica* Nutt.) of the Russian River, near Cloverdale, has been the largest tree of its species on public record. There is a much greater laurel, however, heretofore unknown both to botanists and to the thousands of people who daily pass within half a mile of it. Its measurements indicate that the Cloverdale tree must take second place in regard to size. This laurel stands on the eastern outskirts of the village of San Lorenzo, Alameda County.

The dimensions of this tree are interesting and impressive. The trunk, as often in other large trees of this species, has an enormous flare near the base. At the ground, the circumference of the trunk is exactly forty-nine feet. Four feet above the ground where the trunk is smallest, it measures twenty-eight feet and four inches in girth. Between four and eight feet from the ground the main stem gives way to five huge branches, the largest two of which each measure fourteen feet in circumference, making these limbs very nearly as large as the trunk of the Cloverdale Laurel.

The San Lorenzo tree is seventy feet high, and eighty-five feet in crown diameter. The obvious disproportion between the dimensions of the trunk and of the crown find explanation in a disastrous event in the tree's life which took place about thirty-five years ago. A huge limb, weakened, no doubt, by age and great weight, had broken from its place and crashed to the ground. The little lady who then owned the property, fearful that the weight and spread of the limbs would cause the tree to split apart, and, perhaps, crush her little frame house, sought to find a man who would remove some of the most menacing branches. As a result, but quite contrary to her intentions, all that remained of the great tree was an immense trunk, dividing into five huge branches that terminated abruptly about twenty feet from the ground. Because of this unfortunate event, the upper part of the tree's present crown is formed entirely by very long and slender branches, none of which exceeds one foot in diameter; from their lower sides hang long, cord-like branchlets that sweep the ground in a circle about the trunk. Undoubtedly, the crown was formerly much larger.

At present, the tree is about seventy-five feet north of the bank of San Lorenzo Creek and about twice that distance from the main channel of that stream; but in time past, due to the stream's shifting in flood season, the tree was much nearer the creek. The first white man who lived in that vicinity used to tell about passing along the road that followed the stream bank, and stopping to eat his lunch beneath the friendly branches of the great laurel. In the side of the trunk toward the stream, there was once a great cavity, large enough to admit several children or crouching adults within the tree. Its interior was charred, and old Spanish coins have been found outside, beneath the tree. It is a tale of the tree's owner, who used the hollow

for a playhouse when she was a child, that it was in former years a place where Indians met and gambled; and that they, perhaps, built fires there, causing its charred condition. As late as ten years ago, the entrance to the hollow was still large enough to admit a small person. At the present time the bark has so nearly covered the cavity that it is impossible for one to insert the hand, where once a man could enter.

The reason that this great tree has been so long unknown to the general public lies in the fact that it stands in the grounds of a private residence (at 624 Lewelling Road, formerly called Main Street) and its trunk cannot be seen from the main road. The crown can be seen for a considerable distance; but there are other trees in the immediate vicinity, and the laurel attracts no attention until one has entered the yard in which it stands, and is in view of its great trunk. The house beneath the tree was built in 1864.

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## A VARIANT OF THE COAST LIVE OAK

JOHN THOMAS HOWELL

AN OLD NAME RECONSIDERED. In the late autumn of 1851 the members of the Sitgreaves exploring expedition to southwestern United States crossed the Salton Sink of the Colorado Desert on their route to San Diego and the Pacific, and, passing beyond San Felipe, ascended the western mountains. The summits of these, according to Dr. S. W. Woodhouse, surgeon and naturalist to the expedition, were covered with tall pines, and on the dividing ridge was found and collected a species of live-oak (Report of an Expedition down the Zuñi and Colorado Rivers, 40,—1853). Together with the other botanical collections, specimens of this oak passed to Dr. John Torrey for study and in his report on the botany of the expedition he described as new this tree from Santa Ysabel and named it *Quercus oxyadenia* (loc. cit., 172, pl. 17). And thus it was that that form of *Q. agrifolia* inhabiting the higher slopes and canyons of eastern San Diego Co. became known in botany; but ever since its first publication the name has never been used and it has long been relegated to synonymy under *Q. agrifolia*.

Although *Q. oxyadenia* is probably too near *Q. agrifolia* to be tenable as a species, the Torrey oak has been noted on several occasions in the field as a well marked form deserving at least varietal recognition. The shape and size of leaves and acorns, which were the distinguishing characters according to Torrey, fall well within the specific bounds of variation in *Q. agrifolia*, but the dense and persistent pubescence which entirely covers the lower side of leaves, petioles, and branchlets is not found in any other form of that species. Because of the distinctive nature of this character and its variance from the normal type, the Torrey oak is here designated *Q. agrifolia* var. *oxyadenia* (Torr.) J. T. Howell, comb. nov.

This variety is typically developed in the high valleys and canyon